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Cooks Current Newsletter

This quarter is devoted to the early history of the organization, Cooks Creek Watershed Association

By: Marjorie Hunt

It makes sense that if Tat Moyer gave you the first chapter of Cooks Creek Watershed Association history, I should be the next graying dinosaur to come forth. (Editor's note: see the Fall 2013 issue of *Cooks Current*.) I got into the association at just about the same time that Tat, still teaching at the time, became less active in it. My joining was not entirely voluntary. Anke Ellis, one of the early members, had more or less strong armed and shamed me into attending meetings. We'd just moved into the Springtown area, and having been burned out by involvement in many organizations in our former town, I had vowed to be a dedicated non-joiner for a while, out of an instinct for self protection. On the other hand, I did consider myself an environmentalist in the early and often most evangelical part of the movement, and it didn't take much shaming from Anke to bring me in.

Of all the members at that time, Anke may have been the most vociferous and often the most active. She was our representative to larger and umbrella groups like the DVRPC (Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission), attending their meetings, and others, even when it meant much driving on her part. She was also our liaison with other Watersheds. Later, we often went together to meetings in Philadelphia, but she was the one who kept up with the reading and the work, always trying to involve our group in the larger pattern. Ironically, Anke was probably the reason I left the organization when I did, some ten years later, although my increased involvement in Lehigh University life and my full-time writing and editing job may also have contributed to my decision.

The other people I recall from those days were Peter Fuller who later became president and let us meet in a sort of clubhouse on his property; Jere Knight, a well-known local personality and a shaping force in the group, always spurring petition drives and campaigns; Barbara Hahn, perhaps the hardest worker of us all, with a fine mind for the science behind what we did; Dick Reihman whom I associate particularly with the annual tree sale and pre-sale preparation sessions in the firehouse or the Meases' garage, and who was dependable, but seemed sad, perhaps because of the recent death of his son; Sam Workman and his Nebraska-born wife who'd retired to the area and who (particularly Sam) did a pamphlet on local history; the newlywed Orbens, always hard working particularly on work projects and trash pick-ups, with Debbie's particular dedication to ending nuclear power dependency; Binny Silverman and Kevin Dilworth, not married yet but always sitting entwined at the meetings in the church on Main Street, Springtown; and others who, I'm sure, will pop into my mind as I write. The Meases, already involved in the Audubon Society as well, were less active, as was Tat, Ginny Derbyshire who faithfully tested the Watershed's then near perfect water and reported to us, and Renee Miller, who later started a recycling program. Renee Watterson was also involved, as were Rosi McIlwain and Nancy McNamara. Later arrivals were Lois and David Oleksa who really pitched in in all ways.

So what did we do in all those weekly meetings and working weekends? To begin with, we elected officers and ran meetings by some approximation to the Roberts' Rules of Order, though some of us cared more about that aspect than others did. As I recall, there was a period when some of us were working on revisions to the mission statement and by-laws, a time consuming and less than stimulating exercise that organizations feel compelled to do. A nominating committee put forth a slate that we vot-ed in. Not long after I joined, I was asked to be secretary. Knowing that it was

easier to hide behind a notepad than to speak at meetings, I agreed. Little did I know that I would become what the fading Soviet Russians of the time would call a permanent secretary. I kept the position for about eight years, I think, through the presidencies of Barbara Hahn, Jere Knight, Peter Fuller, and perhaps others.

For such a relatively small active group, we had taken on a good bit of work, by ourselves and with others. Each year we raised money through a tree sale. Subsidized small saplings of evergreen varieties were collected from some larger environmental group and, always on some freezing evening in very early spring, repackaged into small bundles. These were on sale at the firehouse. There was also a trash collecting day though, as Tat said earlier, not as big as the present one. A covered dish meal with a speaker or forum was held, sometimes at the Durham mill, fairly late in October. Many earlier members and non-member community people turned out for that. Occasionally, we also had speakers for Tuesday night meetings. I visualize those as having been held at a Springtown church, but there must have been other venues too. I recall one meeting addressed by a representative of the energy business advocating nuclear plants as the answer to all man's ills. Later groups would have listened less politely than we did, I think.

Occasionally, we heard from other groups or projects, such as a movement to install bluebird houses or one to encourage cold water fish or bats. Even back then, we were hoping to become eligible to have the Creek rated as a cold water habitat. In that, we cooperated with Trout Unlimited. So far, I've just been talking about the usual ho-hum 9-5 activities, but where would a watershed association be without crises?

The first of those that I recall started with a plan of the Interstate Energy Company (a subsidiary of Pennsylvania Power and Light) to establish what they called a "break-out facility" in a field in Pleasant Valley. Rosi McIlwain, and perhaps others, had already circulated a petition in which neighbors of the intended site objected to it. We were to continue that effort, but also to present a position paper on possible environmental damage projected to result from the facility. Jere Knight, Barbara Hahn, Jim Orben, several others, and I went into high gear. I most remember interviewing a geologist on the damage to soil resulting from oil spills and leakage. I learned how leakage is discovered, what types of petroleum products and raw materials are carried in pipelines, how storage facilities function, and much more that I have forgotten. I wrote that section of the lengthy document we were to present, while others covered other aspects such as potential damage to wildlife, to streams, and to soil. Jere Knight, who was the general coordinator, although Barbara Hahn did most of the work, kept insisting on summaries, summaries of summaries and so on. I learned that in spite of her present Quaker and pacifist ideals, she had once worked as a WAC (Women's Army Corp) and that is how military documents were to be done.

When the hearing finally arrived, it was held in the Township Building, and brought out a crowd larger than I had ever seen in the area. Almost all were on our side. Close to the last minute, I'd gotten such bad stage fright over having to stand in front of so large a group that I'd begged my husband to stand in for me. This he, in his kindness, did, to my great relief, in the process probably being acknowledged as author of the document he'd barely read up until then. It was sort of like the solicitor/barrister system in England, I guess. It was weeks before we knew the outcome of the presentation at the Springfield Township public thirteen meeting. Reports had it that the Interstate Energy people felt as if they had unwittingly walked right into a buzz-saw. They'd assumed ours was a rural and uneducated sector and they'd had the surprise of their careers. Of course, they just moved their plans to another, less belligerent, township—Lower Saucon. But we did do some good. Breakout facilities are ugly as well as being dangerous. This one would have been near a school and close to water supply recharge. I've often wondered how life would have been changed for us all had it gone through.

Winning one battle encouraged us in others. The next time I recall having to enlist the help of my husband, though, was when Peter Fuller was improving his property on Slifer Valley Road, and we voted to turn part of the long hillside across from the farm into a wildlife trail. We conducted several trial walks and then seriously laid out a path, mostly in woods, but also from nearer the house. Rare sedges had been found in Peter's pond area and we had to see those. There were also reports of a

rarer still bog turtle. That was the first time I clearly recall working with Lois Oleksa. Together, in Peter's part of the creek, we came upon a geode, a whole geode. Secretly, I wanted to keep and open it, but I knew that as an environmentalist I should leave Nature alone. We put it down. I wonder who found it next. It was my husband, John, who designed and made the boxes for guided directions for the eventual trail; I wrote the directions. The trail is still there despite changes of hand and family tragedy. Like the people at Peace Valley Conservancy, we tried for a while to conduct Sunday afternoon nature walks on the trail. Peter and Kevin found a weird character who called himself Mountain Man Mooney to lead one such hike. The rough person seemed to know more about ginseng and marijuana than about wildflowers. I'm sure other walks were more rewarding.

As we matured as an organization, some inevitable specialization occurred. There was a fairly large group that met every Saturday afternoon to try to negotiate right-of-way for fishermen along portions of the creek in private hands. When cold-water status was denied, at least in part because of livestock damage to Creek banks, work projects were organized to repair damage by using gabions and shoring up banks. Unfortunately, my Saturdays were already occupied in other ways and I could not participate. For those who did, the work days became the heart of our mission, especially those that took place on a section of land near what was then Ulmer's Dairy near Durham. The Oleksa's were much involved there, and so I would hope that it is to Lois that I pass the dinosaur bone wand of the old timers and emeriti. Long Live the Watershed!